

THE ILLUSION OF THE CHARKA

“The programme of the *Charka* is so utterly childish
that it makes one despair to see the whole
country deluded by it.”

Rabindranath Tagore,

ANILBARAN RAY

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THE ILLUSION OF THE CHARKA

I

A FEW PLAIN FACTS ABOUT KHADI

It is being persistently claimed on behalf of the *Charka* that wherever it has been introduced it has materially improved the condition of the poor people. But a perusal of the reports of the various *Khaddar* organisations in the country shows that the average income from spinning (including carding) is *less than eight annas a month*.

At the famous Gandhi Ashram at Pudukpalayam in South India 2,402 spinners were

paid Rs. 69,681 only in the course of three years and three months. This amounts to less than twelve annas per head per month. The well-known Abhoya Ashram in Bengal paid Rs. 25,000 only as wages to 9,000 spinners in 1927. The average comes to less than four annas a month. Only persons who are under a hypnotic spell can say that the addition of four annas or even twelve annas to the monthly income of a person materially improves his economic condition.

Even this most insignificant income from spinning is possible only because *Khaddar* is being made to sell at a price exorbitantly higher than mill-cloth. Mahatma Gandhi has gone so far as to say that "*Khaddar* is cheap at any price"! An artificial market is being kept up for *Khaddar* at a tremendous cost of public energy and money.

By a persistent vigorous propaganda the patriotic and charitable feelings of the people are being exploited in favour of *Khadi*. The Congress is spending the best part of its constructive energy on *Khaddar* work. Municipalities, Corporations and other local bodies

under the control of the Congress are making compulsory purchase of *Khaddar* for their servants. All Congressmen are bound to wear *Khadi* and persons not doing so, have every chance of being hooted out of all political meetings and conferences. No one dares say anything publicly against *Khadi*. Mahatma Gandhi himself has declared: "To me it appears to be monstrous to see the slightest opposition to such an incredibly simple thing as the *Khadi*."

In spite of all this attempt for about eight years *Khaddar* has not come to stay. The *Charka* is practically nowhere plying on the independent cottage industry basis, people supplying their own need of cloth, which was the original ideal. The spinners depend on the various *Khadi* centres for the supply of their cotton as well as for the disposal of their products. These centres have to be run at a considerable cost depending on recurring public subscriptions for their very existence.

The present output of *Khaddar* is being maintained at a great expense. The public pay subscriptions for the speedy attainment of Swaraj and the real amelioration of the condi-

tion of the poor. This money is being diverted to *Khaddar* work. The All-India Spinners' Association had invested by the 30th September, 1927, Rs. 19,54,377 in spinning wheels. It has produced during the last year cloth of the value of Rs. 24 lakhs. At a rough estimate 84 lakhs of square yards of *Khadi* were sold during the year. This is a poor figure for an investment of 20 lakhs of rupees!

While the total of other sources is 50,860 lacs of yards the hand-spun *Khaddar* amounts to only 84 lacs of yards. This is the progress achieved in eight years in spite of the utmost efforts of a man like Mahatma Gandhi and of organisations like the Indian National Congress. Instead of throwing all the blame on the worthless shoulders of the Indian people, is it not high time now to consider whether the programme itself is at all worth the trouble that is being taken for it?

The *Khaddar* centres are working at a loss. The All-India Spinners' Association lost over a lakh of rupees last year. Thus to maintain even the present insignificant output of *Khadi* the generous public must regularly

replenish the vanishing funds of the Association. It is not surprising that the General Council of the Association has recently decided to make again an All-India tour to collect subscriptions for *Khaddar* work.

The simple reason why the *Charka* cannot establish itself is that it has absolutely no chance of ever standing in competition with the Mill. The mill-owners possessing a bigger purse buy cotton at a rate much cheaper than the home spinner can ever expect to get. Then the cost of production is beyond any comparison. The result is that the money that is required to buy cotton and pay the cost of weaving for a piece of *Khadi* is more than sufficient to buy a much better finished mill-cloth, thus leaving absolutely no margin for the spinner and the carder; and the argument that whatever is earned in leisure hours is a gain does not apply as there is no chance of earning anything at all.

It is for this quite obvious reason that the *Charka* has been given up everywhere. A charge is very commonly brought in our country against the British that they destroyed our *Charka* industry. But the *Charka* dis-

appeared from India almost at the same time as it disappeared from Great Britain itself and other parts of the world. The true charge that we can bring against British rule in this respect is that our cotton mills could not flourish on account of the unfair competition with Manchester.

The old ideal that the agriculturist should grow his own cotton and spin his cloth as he cooks his food, is not applicable to modern conditions. Apart from the fact that cotton cannot be grown everywhere and by everybody, cotton has now a world market and the cultivator comfortably makes more profit by selling his cotton and buying mill-cloth than by carding and spinning it at his leisure hour and paying wages to the weaver.

Actual facts show that people now do not spin for home consumption but to make some earning through the *Khaddar* centres. What they earn by spinning they spend in buying mill-cloth, mostly foreign cloth.

The fact that people are not wanting who are ready to spin even for the most insignificant earning shows only the deep

poverty of the masses but not the capacity of the *Charka* to remedy it.

The poverty of the Indian people can be cured only by removing foreign rule and foreign competition, placing the primitive agriculture of the country on a scientific basis, introducing big machinery and large-scale production, supplemented by suitable cottage industries with modern devices and methods, together with necessary improvements in banking, co-operation, tariff, facilities of transport and so forth. The economic depression in our country is too deep and complex a matter to be dealt with by "such an incredibly simple thing as the *Khadi*."

The proposal that our poor cultivators should work in their leisure hours on the *Charka* to add a few annas to their monthly income is inhuman. While all over the world attempts are being made to reduce the hours of work and the cost of production so that all people may get plenty of leisure and sufficient opportunity to fully develop their body, mind and spirit, our *Khaddarites* are trying to lead India in just the opposite direction !

One argument very commonly advanced in favour of the *Charka* as against the mill is that it avoids all the evils of industrialism. This argument, however, is useless as industrialism is already upon us and no one can prevent the introduction of big machinery. Even the *Charka* work that has been possible under modern conditions is being carried on more or less on the factory system. Then the *Khaddarites* only object to the cotton mills, while Mahatma Gandhi would go so far as to allow even cotton mills side by side with the *Charka* though we fail to see how the two can go together.

Big machinery is inevitable and the poverty of our people can be removed only by large-scale production. Big machinery does not necessarily imply all the evils of industrialism. The evils are bound to disappear. The different ideas and schemes that have been suggested in Europe show that people are trying to correct the defects. Unless one enters into it how can the evils be overcome? It is the tendency of the Indians towards poverty which is really responsible for the cry against machinery.

The *Charka* stands in the way of true constructive village work. Money raised for village reconstruction is being used for the organisation of *Khaddar* production. But the *Charka* has no power of creating life in the villages. To infuse life into the villagers means to stimulate them to change and improve their present wretched condition in all possible ways and to combine with one another for that purpose. The *Charka* gives no such incentive to them but tries to make their present miserable condition a little more tolerable; thus it serves rather as an opiate! Then there is no element of combination or co-operation in *Charka*. The spinners are merely wage-earners who work individually at home in their leisure hours and for their earning depend absolutely on the *Khaddar* centres.

Again *Khaddar* work has become synonymous with village construction and our patriotic young men feeling no enthusiasm at all for this barren lifeless programme of the *Charka*, turn away altogether from the prospect of village work. *Khaddar* production is being organised almost everywhere by paid

workers who earn their livelihood by this work. One Khadi Pratisthan alone in Bengal has employed seventy-seven paid workers.

Local bodies are wasting on *Khadi* much money which could have been used for real constructive work. Srijut Jamshed Mehta, who is the President of the Karachi Municipality, recently moved a resolution there to stop the compulsory purchase of *Khadi* for the menial staff. In moving that resolution he remarked that during the last three years the Corporation had spent no less than one lakh of rupees for encouraging this cottage industry. . . . The councillors were doing great injustice to themselves and to the rate-payers by spending such an enormous amount on *Khadi*. It was really a cruelty to ask the sweepers to wear the heavy cloth and go in the streets. Moreover, white *Khadi* become dirty soon and the poor peons had to spend lot of money for washing. The colour was tried but found useless. The President emphatically declared: "I tell you it is a real cruelty. We have spent nearly a lakh of rupees but Rs. 85,000 is really wasted. Our purpose has not been served."

Khaddar has absolutely no political significance beyond 'the fact that it has been adopted as the uniform dress by the Congress. On the other hand the compulsory provision that every Congressman must habitually wear *Khaddar* stands in the way of many sincere and honest patriots' joining the Congress.

II

REJOINDER BY A KHADDARITE

“The Poverty of the Indian People” writes Mr. Anilbaran Ray in his article entitled “A few plain facts about *Khadi*”, “can be cured only by removing foreign rule and foreign competition, placing the primitive agriculture of the country on a scientific basis, introducing big machinery and large-scale production, supplemented by suitable cottage industries with modern devices and methods, together with necessary improvements in banking, co-operation, tariff, facilities of transport and so forth.” No doubt, this is the dream of all patriotic Indians. But this dream cannot be materialised for a long time to come. It requires a very bulky capital to put the “primitive agriculture of the country on a scientific basis,” and also to introduce “big machinery for large-scale production,”

and too poor as we are, and as our steel industry is in its infancy, we will have to rely upon foreign capital, if this will be available at all, and we will have to import the whole machinery from foreign people, which will be indeed a colossal drain of India's wealth. Perhaps these novel suggestions may be relished by imbecile theorists, but a man with a little bit of practical sense does not get enamoured of such noble dreams! Whether these things will benefit the masses at large in the long run, or they will only swell the purses of our capitalists need not be enquired into here. For the present purpose it suffices to recognise the above dreams, as "dreams," inasmuch as the hunger of our agricultural population will not wait in patience and contentment till the dawning of such "golden" days. What is required is something useful to the "Now." And, we *Khaddarites* are firmly convinced of the efficacy of *Khaddar* in ameliorating, in however small a manner, the present "body-killing and soul-killing" condition of our agriculturists. The bulk of India's people is agricultural, and since they have work in the field only for about six

months, they can profitably harness the other six months for *Charka*-work, and as something is better than nothing, they will be only thankful for what little they can make out of *Charka*. When a patriotic demand for Khadi is created, they will have enough and more work to do, and consequently enough food to satisfy their hunger and also enough clothing for themselves. As in every other commodity, in *Khaddar* also, the commercial law of "supply and demand" has its sway. Of course, the *Khaddar* is a bit costly. It is coarse. It gets soiled soon. We do not deny these facts. But it should be borne in mind that with us *Khaddar* has not yet become a "profit-loss business". It is yet in its infancy. It has got to compete with the Indian mills, Japan, and last but not the least Lancashire. Under the circumstances, we cannot but call upon the patriotism of the people, when they murmur about the coarseness and the high cost of *Khadi*. With all these handicaps, it has made vast progress, of which every *Khaddarite* is only too proud.

I have no wish or patience to analyse the idle arguments of Mr. Ray advanced against

Khaddar, because they are the stock arguments of anti-*Khaddarites*; and I will only invite him and them to peruse the recently-published work on *Khadi*, "Economics of Khaddar," by Richard B. Gregg. This gentleman, born and bred up in Henry Ford's country, came to India and studied this subject from all stand-points, and he has given the result of his researches in the above work in a very simple, but forcible and convincing manner.

Let me close this letter by quoting Mr. Edye, Census Officer for the United Provinces. (I have taken this quotation from Mr. Gregg's work referred to above). Speaking of cottage industry as ancillary to agriculture, Mr. Edye writes :

"The bulk of the population is agricultural, and agriculture here means ordinarily the growing, harvesting and disposal of two crops in the year, and not the mixed farming familiar in England. Agriculture of this kind involves very hard work for certain short periods—generally two sowings, two harvests, and occasional weeding in the rains, and three waterings in the cold weather—and almost complete inactivity for the rest of the year. In precarious tracts inactivity may be unavoidable for a whole season, or even for a whole year. These periods of inactivity are, in the great majority of cases, spent in idleness. Where the cultivator pursues some craft

which will employ him and his family at times when they are not required in the fields—a craft in which continuity of employment is not essential—the proceeds of that craft are a saving from waste, and therefore a clear gain. The most typical of such crafts, . . . and the one which is most widely pursued, is the production of home-spun* cloth.”

Now that the sceptics and scoffers have got the testimony of a Government official, they may perhaps begin to think independently. Some people take lightly the words of our simple Mahatma Gandhi. While certain others even consider him eccentric. But, generally all unsophisticated persons have understood the import of his teachings.

*I think here by home-spun cloth Mr. Edey refers to home-woven cloth and not to *Khaddar*. Handloom weaving is widely pursued but not certainly the *Charka*.

III

REJOINDER BY BABU RAJENDRA PRASAD

Mr. Anil Baran Ray in an article in the "*Bombay Chronicle*" of the 17th November has tried to show that the *Khadi* movement is not only useless but harmful to the country. Now the case for *Khadi* has been stated so clearly and on so many occasions that it is really surprising that Mr. Ray should so completely misunderstand it. It is proposed to take the points one by one as raised in his article. He says : "the *Charka* can at best give about eight annas a month to a spinner."

This average he has arrived at by dividing the amount of money said to have been distributed by the number of spinners and months in the period during which it was distributed. There is an obvious fallacy in striking an average in this way. It assumes that all the *Charkas* were plying every day throughout

the period, whereas the fact is that the very nature of the occupation of the spinners makes their work at the *Charka* irregular. They do not spin a given number of hours each day of the month. The hours in the day as also the number of days in the month and even the months in the year are determined by other agricultural work—more time being given to *Charka* in the off season and less in the agricultural sowing or reaping season. As against the imaginary average figure of earning per *Charka* we have the actual figures of some spinners taken at random from the spinners' register at Gandhi Ashram, Tiruchengodu—the very centre whose average Mr. Ray quotes—

Spinners' Regd. No.	July 1927	Aug. 1927	Sep. 1927	Total for 3 months
	RS. A. P.	RS. A. P.	RS. A. P.	RS. A. P.
799	... 4 3 0	4 7 0	3 15 0	12 9 0
29	... 6 5 0	3 5 0	3 4 0	12 14 0
304	... 4 8 0	2 8 0	2 10 0	9 10 0
488	... 4 6 0	3 1 0	1 6 0	8 13 0
1416	... 2 7 0	2 0 0	2 4 0	6 11 0
565	... 4 8 0	2 7 0	2 12 0	9 11 0

It is the uniform experience of all *Khadi* centres that a spinner gets about an anna and a half a day for about 6 hours' spinning. This earning is small undoubtedly, if taken by itself, but is not inconsiderable when we remember that the average income of an Indian has been calculated to be about one anna and seven pies a day. And let it not be forgotten that for this paltry six pice there are thousands who are willing to spin; there can be no question of depriving them of this means of earning without suggesting a better alternative and none has been so far suggested.

Mr. Ray thinks that in spite of persistent propaganda and the exorbitant price paid for *Khaddor*, *Charka* does not ply independently anywhere on cottage industry basis. Here, again, Mr. Ray's conclusion is based on a wrong assumption. He assumes that all the *Khadi* that is produced and all the yarn that is spun on the *Charka* is produced and spun under the auspices of the All-India Spinners' Association. The fact, however, is that the A.I.S.A. publishes statistics of only what is produced by it and has no means of collecting the figures of whole and half

Khaddar and the huge quantity of yarn spun and disposed of by the producers independently of the A.I.S.A. It is a well-known fact that in the Punjab, Rajputana, Bihar, Andhra, U. P., and Bengal large quantities of whole or half *Khaddar* are produced and consumed independently without any effort on anybody's part; and this has continued in spite of the competition with mills—Indian and foreign. The reason is that the cloth has been found to be suitable, durable and on the whole cheap by the consumers. Gandhiji's efforts have been directed towards creating a healthy reaction in favour of handspun as against the flimsy and tawdry fabric imported from abroad, which first came into fashion in towns and has permeated villages also now.

Mr. Ray thinks that it is futile to try to stem the tide of industrialism and *Charka* cannot compete with mills. Mr. Anil Baran Ray admits, however, the fundamental fact of the deep and grinding poverty of the masses and the further undeniable fact remains that millions and millions are unemployed for a great part of their time. The *Charka* gives employment to such unemployed who on ac-

count of their agricultural occupation which can give them only intermittent work near their homes and cannot permit migration to long distances or absence for any long duration are unable to find work for their off seasons. That it has succeeded in supplementing the income of such agriculturists by enabling them to utilise their off hours is proved by the following facts gathered at one of the centres :—(1) Names of village, (2) Number of wheels, (3) Annual earnings from spinning in rupees, (4) Annual agricultural and other incomes of spinning families in rupees, (5) percentage of 3 to 4.

	1	2	3	4	5
Pudupalayam area :					p.c.
1. Uppupalayam		25	460	3360	13
2. Sembampalayam		29	450	3065	15
3. Puliayampatti		20	346	2650	13
4. Chithalandur		25	375	2150	17 ½
5. Pudupalayam		25	336	2398	14
Kanoor area :					
6. Komarapalayam		60	1398	9009	15 ½
7. Chellampalayam		14	242	2190	11
Uttukkul area :					
8. Velampalayam		25	401	1400	28 ⅓
9. Papampalayam		68	1205	5220	23
10. Sembampalayam		14	372	2672	14

The above shows an addition of 11 to 28 per cent in income as a result of spinning over the other income of the families concerned taken as a whole. In individual families the results were even more striking. Sometimes the increase was as much as 50 per cent.

There can be no manner of doubt that although the earning from the *Charka* considered independently is by no means considerable, taken in relation to the other income of the families it represents a substantial increase. Considered from this point of view, viz., of finding work for the unemployed, no question of competing with mills arises.

Mr. Ray, however, makes the curious complaint that the proposal that our cultivators should work in their unemployed hours on the *Charka* is inhuman while all over the world attempts are being made to reduce the hours of work. I confess I am not aware that there is anywhere in the world a proposal to reduce the working hours of the unemployed. On the other hand, the problem of finding work for them is a pressing problem all the world over. In India no attempt has been made to take a census of the unemployed, and

the reason for this omission is obvious, *viz.*, that it will disclose countless millions as unemployed, and the task is too stupendous to be undertaken.

Mr. Ray complains that such a large sum as nearly 20 lacs is invested in *Charka* work and can produce but about 25 lacs worth of *Khaddar*. Mr. Ray forgets again that this sum of 20 lacs is invested not only in producing *Khaddar* but also in marketing it, and if statistics of mills are taken, it will be found that the return for the investment in production and marketing of *Khaddar* can stand fair comparison with similar investments in the mills.

Mr. Ray complains that sums collected for Congress and national work are devoted to *Khaddar*. The charge, in fact, is not true, because nothing that was collected for any other purpose has been diverted. But assuming that money collected for national purposes is used for *Khaddar*, to those who look upon national work in the terms of the masses of the people, nothing is more urgent than an attempt to ameliorate their economic condi-

tion, and *Khaddar* claims to do that as the figures given above testify.

The yearly loss incurred by the *Charka Sangh* is incidental to the reorganisation of an industry which is very nearly dead and which requires to be revived. It is covered mostly by expenses on organisers and experts and office expenses, all of which items may and will disappear when once the industry is reorganised.

The complaint that the *Charka Sangh* is acting like any other capitalist getting *Khaddar* made and selling it and not trying to make spinning for oneself popular is also based on ignorance of facts. As a matter of fact an attempt has been made in this direction and the result achieved at Bijolia where nearly 5000 people have become self-sufficient in respect of their clothing requirements is very encouraging. The work is necessarily slow and requires not only technical skill on the part of the workers but also organising and persuasive powers in the workers engaged.

The greatest shortcoming in Mr. Ray's indictment is the absence of any feasible and practicable alternative plan for immediate

amelioration in however small a degree, of the economic condition of the masses. The general statement regarding improvement in agriculture and the establishment of large scale production factories betrays a confusion of thought. No one objects to improvement in agriculture. *Charka* is not suggested as an alternative but only as a supplementary occupation to agriculture. The establishment of large factories, apart from the great difficulty of finding the necessary capital and the obvious objection on account of the necessity of a great drain on the resources of the country as the price of machinery to be imported and the recurring charges for replacement of parts, repairs, etc., is not likely to solve the problem of unemployment. It is calculated on the other hand, in a country like India which has no outlet for its surplus goods, to intensify the problem of unemployment.

Thus, therefore, if the fundamental facts of poverty and unemployment are admitted, as they cannot but be, and there is no alternative suggested for filling the unemployed hours, *Charka* must hold the field. The nation has paid crores for propping up some

industry or other where the number of the labourers employed and their share in the profits are after all small. Why should we grudge a bounty the whole of which goes straight into the pocket of a most deserving class of people—*viz.*, those who are willing to work and earn but who cannot do so because they have no work.

It is not necessary to consider here the political effect of *Khaddar* as Mr. Ray admits that it has at least some value in that direction.

The most surprising statement, however, is that *Khaddar* stands in the way of village reconstruction. Mr. Ray again speaks without experience and without knowledge. It is common knowledge that *Khaddar* has verily proved to be the centre of many kinds of activities. It has helped the solution of the knotty problem of untouchability; it has served to help anti-drink campaign. It has enabled village education in a small scale to be undertaken. The results may not be very large, but the work itself has not been very intensive as yet; and it has been in more or less an experimental stage. But it has been sufficient to show its possibilities and poten-

tialities, and that is all that the A. I. S. A. can aim at with its limited resources. Given the necessary capital and technical skill and even a fraction of the talent now employed in mills and in improving machinery, one can make bold to claim that *Charka* may hold its own one day even as regards prices of its cloth as it does even to-day to some extent as regards its durability and, to some, even in beauty.

IV

REPLY TO A KHADDARITE

A *Khaddarite* has called me an imbecile theorist and a dreamer because I ventured to suggest that the poverty of the Indian people can be cured only by removing foreign rule and foreign exploitation, and, what would inevitably and speedily follow the removal of foreign rule, the application of science to agriculture, the organisation of large-scale production and so forth. Thus Swaraj to a *Khaddarite* is a dream which "cannot be materialised for a long time to come"! The foreign rule and foreign exploitation will continue, our agriculture will continue to be crude and primitive, we shall suffer all disadvantages as regards banking, exchange, tariff, transport, yet by the magic wand of the *Charka* our poor people will be relieved immediately! This

is the practical sense of our *Khaddarites*. And they have given positive proof of "immediate" help to the poor by annually producing 84 lacs of yards of cloth only by the investment of 20 lacs of rupees after a superhuman effort of eight years!

Immediate relief to the poor can be given only by charitable relief work and *Khaddar* is really proceeding on that basis and not on economic or business lines. To remove the poverty of the people you must add to the production of wealth and stop the drainage, there is no other way. And if this cannot be accomplished immediately, we can immediately start on these lines. Our objection to *Khaddar* is that it is not only giving no real help to the people—a *monthly increase of eight annas in the income is no real help*—but it is doing positive harm by diverting the attention of our national workers from true constructive work and causing enormous waste of public energy and money.

The plain facts I marshalled against *Khaddar* have been brushed aside by one phrase that they are the stock arguments of anti-*Khaddarites*. And Mr. Khaddarite of

course has proceeded to bring forward quite fresh facts and arguments in favour of his fetish! Thus he says that the bulk of India's people is agricultural and they have to work in the field only for about six months, etc. This argument repeated *ad nauseum* is fallacious to the core. In the first place, it is not everywhere in India that the agriculturists have to pass some months in idleness. Then it is only because agriculture is not fully developed that agriculturists do not get full work. Instead of throwing upon them a new work, they should be helped to do their own work well. By adopting simple devices and simple improvements—selection of seeds, selection of bulls, preservation of manure, forming co-operative organisations for sale and purchase,—the agriculturists can make much more profit than they can ever hope to make from spinning and they can be taught and organised to make these improvements by the same effort as is being devoted to the absolutely futile programme of the *Charka*.

Mr. Khaddarite has referred to "Economics of Khaddar" by Richard B. Gregg, which within a year of its appearance has

been raised to the dignity of the Vedas by *Khaddarites* all over India! I can assure Mr. Khaddarite that this is not the first time that I am hearing of that valuable book. But I would at any time depend on my "plain facts" which no *Khaddarite* has dared to deny rather than on Mr. Gregg's researches on the solar energy and the similarity of the human body to a machinery. As a drowning man catches at a straw, so our *Khaddarites* would catch hold of anything that seems to support their pet theory. Thus the testimonial of a Government official, Mr. Edge has been produced in favour of home spun cloth. If our *Khaddarites* find the testimony and advice of Government official so reliable I refer them to the report of the Agricultural Commission and to find out for themselves what place has been given to the *Charka* in that "precious" report.

REPLY TO BABU RAJENDRA PRASAD

In his rejoinder to my article Babu Rajendra Prasad has mostly tried to explain the facts produced by me against *Khadi* but not to deny or contradict them. I leave it to the readers to judge for themselves how far he has succeeded in explaining my "plain facts" so as to defend the cause of *Khadi*.

Babu Rajendra Prasad quotes me thus: He says, "the *Charka* can at best give about eight annas a month to a spinner." These words, however, are not mine but have been put into my mouth by him to suit his own convenience! The *Charka* may 'at best' give more than eight annas but in actual fact in general it has not given so much. From a perusal of the reports of the various *Khaddar* organisations in the country I said, "the average income from spinning is less than

eight annas per month." Rajendra Prasad explains that in some months the earning is larger and in some months it is smaller. But that does not alter the average! If you give full meals to a person for three months that does not compensate for his starving for the rest of the year. Herein lies the necessity of computing the actual average monthly income taking the year as a whole. It is strange that Babu Rajendra Prasad does not see this simple truth.

In order to counteract the impression that the actual earning from the *Charka* is most miserably low Rajendra Prasad has quoted certain curious figures. Thus he gives figures of the income only for those months when the earning is the highest. In another place he has given figures not on the basis of the number of spinners but the number of wheels. Now it is well-known that one wheel is often run by a whole family and the earning by one wheel is not the same as the earning by one person. My average stands on the basis of reports published by the *Khaddar* organisations themselves (including Babu Rajendra Prasad's own branch of the

A. I. S. A. in Bihar) and there is no way of escaping out of it. However in order to make my case still stronger I shall take Babu Rajendra Prasad at his word.

He admits in his rejoinder that a spinner gets about an anna and a half a day for about 6 hours of spinning. Thus by working 6 hours a day he earns less than 3 rupees a month! In another article Babu Rajendra Prasad has said that by working whole time on the *Charka* a person can earn Rs. 5 per month. This is an admitted fact which we must carefully consider in judging the cause of *Khadi*. One must also remember that even this income from spinning is possible only because *Khaddar* is being made to sell at a price much higher than mill-cloth. Whatever improvement you may make in spinning by technical skill and talent in organisation the mills will always produce cloth cheaper and at the same time better in quality than *Khadi*. But let us assume for the sake of argument (though to me this seems to be an impossible assumption) that people will always consent to buy *Khaddar* in preference to cheaper and better mill-cloth. Then the

monthly income from spinning to a whole-time spinner will be between five and six rupees. Can a person decently live on this income? I put this plain question to my readers. It is only when bare squalid poverty is put up as the highest ideal of life that one can seriously make such a proposal. This is the mentality underlying *Khaddar* and Mahatma Gandhi has expressed it times without number. Babu Rajendra Prasad stated in an article on *Khaddar* that when a person bought a rupee's worth of *Khadi* he should remember that he was providing for the meals of a poor unknown sister at least for four or five days. Now when a rupee's worth of *Khaddar* is sold, only four annas go to the spinner (this is a fact admitted by expert *Khaddar* workers and organisers). Thus in Babu Rajendra Prasad's estimation four annas is sufficient to give a poor unknown sister her meals at least for four or five days!

It is this tendency of the Indians towards poverty which is responsible for many of their evils and the *Khaddar* movement is emphasising and feeding this wrong mentality. Eminent specialists have come to the conclu-

sion that for the proper feeding of a person it is necessary to spend from five to six annas per day. This means at least Rs. 10 per month for food only. Then one must have a sanitary dwelling place, sufficient clothing, treatment in case of disease, provision for the future, recreation, education for children and all such things are absolutely necessary. Can the *Charka* programme ever hope to ameliorate the condition of the poor according to this decent human standard?

It is no use arguing that the *Charka* is only a supplementary industry and people are not expected to depend solely on the *Charka*. If a person earns 5 rupees a month by working whole time on the *Charka* he cannot earn more than a rupee by working on it as a supplementary occupation and actual facts give even a much lower average. In what way will this insignificant addition to his income improve his economic condition?

But the stock argument of the *Khaddarites* is that as the average income of an Indian is one anna and seven pies per day an increment of six pies or even three pies is not negligible. Rajendra Prasad has quoted figures to show

that in many cases the income of a family has been raised 11 per cent. or even 28 per cent. When the monthly income of a person is only Rs. 3 or Rs. 4 it is certainly better to make it Rs. 5 or Rs. 6. But should that be our ideal? Should we move heaven and earth only for this? What does it matter that the increment is 50 per cent. or even 100 per cent. as long as the actual total income remains within Rs. 5 or Rs. 6? Instead of defending the meagre earning from the *Charka* by comparing it with the average low income of our people our aim should be *to increase that average* so that they may live like human beings and herein comes the necessity of improving our agriculture on scientific lines and introducing large-scale production through machinery. By adding a rupee to the monthly income of our miserable agriculturists we do not ameliorate their condition but only prolong their misery and consign them to slow death and sure dehumanisation.

Babu Rajendra Prasad shows a great confusion of thought when he mentions the *Charka* as a boon to the stupendous number of the unemployed in our country. He him-

self has admitted that "*Charka* is not suggested as an alternative but only as a supplementary occupation to agriculture." Thus the *Charka* according to its own votaries is not meant for the unemployed but for those who have already an occupation in agriculture. But neither as a sole industry nor as a supplementary occupation do we find any efficacy of the *Charka*.

But the greatest shortcoming in my indictment, says Rajendra Prasad, is "the absence of any feasible and practicable alternative plan for immediate amelioration in however small a degree." My article was expressly written to show only that the *Charka* brought no immediate amelioration and I think I have sufficiently established my point and Babu Rajendra Prasad himself seems to feel it in the heart of his heart. If he would throw away the hypnotic spell of the *Charka* which is blinding his vision he will easily find out "feasible and practicable alternative plans for immediate amelioration." Thus instead of trying to thrust the *Charka* on the agriculturists we should see first what possibilities and scope agriculture itself affords for imme-

diate improvement. Rajendra Prasad does not object to improvement in agriculture, but why does he not try first in that direction leaving aside the fetish of the *Charka*? It is certainly not possible immediately to make our agriculture wholly scientific and up-to-date, but we can immediately begin on that line and that will bring immediate amelioration to a degree not possible by the *Charka*. Apart from such simple improvements as the selection of seeds, the selection of bulls, the prevention of the enormous thoughtless waste of manure and its proper use, the agriculturists may be induced to form themselves into co-operative irrigation societies, co-operative credit societies, co-operative sale and purchase societies and so forth. In this way the villagers will be truly roused and organised. The energy and the money that is now being spent on the *Charka* and the propagation of *Khaddar*, if applied to the organisation of the agriculturists and their training in simple devices and improved methods, will immediately bring much greater profits than they can ever expect from spinning.

If supplementary work is to be given to the agriculturists one should look to such allied occupations as cattle breeding, dairy farming, poultry farming, fish culture, flower culture, fruit culture, sericulture and similar other industries that may be found suitable to local conditions. All this is not absolutely unknown to our agriculturists but a deadly inertia and helplessness has come upon them and they have lost the ancient art and the ancient vigour. These should be revived and modern devices and knowledge applied—on this way lies the true amelioration of the wretched condition of our people.

Side by side with this improvement in agriculture if big factories are gradually started to manufacture various articles of use which we are now importing from other lands, many persons who now depend on agricultural work will go to the factories, and the remaining agriculturists will get more lands and consequently more work. Money will flow from the factories to the villages and improve them, the agricultural products will have a better market and agriculture itself will be improved by the help of machinery. The

agriculturists will get better price for their raw materials*and will be able to buy their necessary articles cheaper from the factories.

Rajendra Prasad raises certain objections to large scale production through machinery. The first is the difficulty of finding the necessary capital. But why does he forget that *Khaddar* work also requires a big capital? It has been necessary to invest 20 lacs of rupees to produce 24 lacs of rupees worth of *Khaddar* annually! Another objection is that the buying of machinery will involve a great drain on the resources of the country. But what we shall spend on the machinery will stop the drain of crores of rupees that we are spending annually to import mill-made things from other lands—thus it is a gain and not a loss to the country. Gradually machinery also will be manufactured in our own country. Rajendra Prasad's own province contains sufficient iron and coal to provide all the machinery we need and also to export to our hearts' content. As regards textile machinery opinion has been expressed by some that the cotton mills that now exist in the country can double their production by

working full time thus supplying almost all the cloth that we now import from foreign lands and at the same time giving employment to twice the number that is now employed in the mills. The last objection raised against big machinery is that India has no outlet for her manufactured goods. But India herself possesses a market which attracts the greed of all the industrial nations of the world. This is the unique advantage of India that she possesses inexhaustible raw materials and natural resources and an almost unlimited market within her own borders. It is really surprising that our eminent men like Babu Rajendra Prasad cannot appreciate these simple facts of our economic life.

He ends his rejoinder by repeating a personal attack on me that I speak without experience and without knowledge. Begging humbly to be excused for this personal reference I must say in self-defence that in the matter of experience and knowledge of *Khaddar* work, I yield to none. For six great years of my life I did my utmost for *Khaddar*. Even while undergoing imprison-

ment under the Bengal Ordinance I religiously devoted one hour daily to spinning to see for myself what power the *Charka* actually possessed. Yes, I tried the *Charka* in every possible way and at last found it wanting. It is not a novice, not an idle critic that speaks here. I was the one man in India who carried the loin-cloth even to the citadel of the bureaucracy. Covering my loin only with a rough piece of *Khadi* I appeared before the Governor in the Bengal Council though I had been warned by the President that His Excellency would take it as a direct insult to him. But on that day the whole of India was behind me. Now I know that the better part of political India is against me in the matter of *Khaddar*, still I do not recoil in the least as I feel that truth is on my side. As long as the people of India will continue to give me a hearing I will warn them with all the force and emphasis I can command that the *Khaddar* movement is not only useless, it is positively harmful, it truly stands in the way of the political, economical and spiritual progress of India.

VI

THE BEGINNING OF THE END

It is said that I hold in contempt an addition of an anna or so to the villagers income through spinning. There people misunderstand me. I do not grudge the addition of even a single pie by spinning provided it is practicable and provided that by the same amount of energy and money we spend for this we cannot give them a much larger addition. I have proved by facts and figures that those two conditions are not satisfied. It is admitted that the earning by the *Charka* is miserable. Apart from this important and vital aspect of the question I have shown that even this miserable earning is possible only because certain people consent to buy *Khaddar* leaving aside much cheaper and better mill-cloth. This however is practicable only within very narrow limits and for a limited period.

This is a most important aspect of the question to which due attention is not paid by the advocates of *Khaddar*. They continually harp on the deep poverty and the enforced idleness of our people, on the ease with which the *Charka* can be adopted and learned by every body, on the convenience of working it at any time and at any place. All this is granted. But of what avail is all this facility of the *Charka* if you cannot sell the *Charka*-made yarn? This is the difficulty which with the advent of mills made the immemorial *Charka* a relic of the past. Readers of *Young India* will find there an interesting account of the attempt that is being made in Mysore to revive the *Charka* industry. There the spinning of yarn had died out less than 20 years ago "because there was no demand for the yarn." Some of the spinners were willing to re-start working the *Charka* 'if raw cotton was advanced to them and an undertaking was given that the yarn would be purchased.' The All-India Spinners' Association had to give that undertaking before the work could start there. This is the condition everywhere. If you

undertake to dispose of the yarn, if the people of India consent to buy *Khaddar* 'at any price' as suggested by Mahatma Gandhi then of course our poor people can earn something, however miserable, by spinning. But is this practicable? Some men for some time may consent to do this, but the sheer force of economic pressure will compel the *Charka* yarn to recede before the rising tide of mill-yarn and mill-cloth. If by an Aladdin's lamp you can stop the mills not only in India but all over the world, only then the *Charka* will supply a universal want and again stand on its own legs and come to stay.

Some people raise the political question of the boycott of British cloth and observe that *Khaddar* is necessary to complete the boycott. They admit that 'with propaganda and enterprise' the Indian mills can supply three-fourths of our requirements. But do they really believe that *Khaddar* will be able to supply the rest in the near future? One fourth of our need means roughly about 45 crores of rupees' worth of cloth. And after an almost superhuman effort of eight years by our national workers and organisations the

country has been able to produce annually not certainly more than thirty lakhs of rupees' worth of *Khaddar*. That is certainly not a practical proposition to complete the cloth boycott with the help of the *Charka*. If we are in earnest we can immediately complete the boycott by helping and stimulating our mills to produce their utmost and by supplementing the deficit with imports from countries other than Britain; only this is a politically practical proposition. With sufficient backing by the people and the Government of the country the Indian mills, I believe, can very soon supply all the cloth we need. But our alien Government is more concerned with the interests of Manchester and it is all the more necessary that the people of India should stand by the mills at this critical time when by the step-motherly treatment of the Government they have been placed in a very dangerous predicament.

But what is the lead our National Congress is going to give to the country in this vital matter? When I wrote in the *Chronicle* that *Khaddar* stood in the way of our economical progress I did not know that another positive

proof of it would be forthcoming so soon. The authorities of the Calcutta Congress Exhibition have refunded the money advanced by the various Indian mills to hire stalls in the exhibition. This they have done not because they were convinced that mill-cloth should be excluded and they expressly said so, but because they wanted to placate the *Khaddarites* for political reasons! The *Khaddarites* know at heart that *Khaddar* cannot stand before mill cloth; they have succeeded in excluding their formidable rival from the exhibition grounds, but will they be similarly successful in excluding foreign cloth from the country? Certainly not. The Indian National Congress may help to paralyse the Indian cotton mills by declaring Non-co-operation with them at a time when they most need its co-operation, but their place will be immediately taken up, not certainly by the *Charka*, but by foreign mills, especially those of Lancashire.

Not by reason, not by moral persuasion but by the sheer threat of boycott at this critical political juncture the *Khaddarites* have coerced the authorities of the Calcutta

Exhibition against their express will to exclude mill-yarn and even mill-cloth made of Indian yarn from their show. The *Khaddarites* may have thus scored an apparent victory, but in reality they have suffered a moral defeat and that is always the beginning of the end.

VII

MORE PLAIN FACTS ABOUT KHADDAR

Though I find that there is not much substance in what Mr. "Khandeshi" has said in reply to my "plain facts about *Khaddar*" and that his main points have been answered in what I have already written on the subject in the *Chronicle* yet in order to clear any possible misunderstanding of my views I would like to give a somewhat detailed reply to Mr. Khandeshi if the gentle readers would have the patience to follow me further in the discussion of this subject of vital importance to the nation.

Mr. Khandeshi begins his reply by saying, ' "No advocate of *Khadi* has ever said that *Charka* has 'materially' improved the condition of the poor people." Here is at least one *Khaddarite* who openly admits that the *Charka* does not 'materially' help the poor.

Why then this fuss about the *Charka*? Why is all the nation's constructive energy and money sought to be concentrated on this quite ineffective spinning wheel and why are the poor people of India asked to make considerable pecuniary sacrifice for buying *Khaddar*? Should we not rather find out 'the true way of materially helping the poor' and concentrate all our efforts on that?

I incidentally referred to the charge brought against the British that they destroyed our *Charka* industry. The charge is so common and it has been so widely and insistently preached in our country that Mr. Khandeshi need not have taken the trouble of referring me to Dutt's Economic History of India. My intention in referring to the charge was to draw the attention of my countrymen to the real truth about the matter. I did not deny the historical fact that the hirelings of the East India Company often practised inhuman tortures on our craftsmen: but their attack was mainly directed against the weavers, how is it then that the weaving industry is still flourishing while the *Charka* could not hold its own?

Whatever might have been the methods adopted by the over-zealous Company officials to suppress our cotton industry, it was the cheap products of the British mills which really ousted the spinning wheel; and the handloom weaving survived to the extent it has done because it took the help of the mills themselves by weaving mill-yarn. Let an American historian speak how British craftsmen were ruined by the advent of machinery :

"The craftsmen found the competition of the factory too much for them, as the machine made things much cheaper, if not better, than their hand-work; consequently, many artisans were ruined by the labour of the 'iron men', as the machines were called. A series of riots broke out against the 'iron men'; many machines were destroyed by mobs, and Hargreaves (inventor of the spinning-jenny—1765) himself was attacked by the rioters. But it was all in vain. The artisans were soon forced to give up their hopeless struggle against machinery."—*Modern and Contemporary Europe*, by J. S. Schapiro.

My contention is this that in India the immemorial *Charka* really disappeared* because the yarn produced by it could not compare in price with mill-yarn. Technical skill in spinning which is now being sought to be revived was not wanting at the time when spinning had to be given up, yet the

Charka could not compete with the newly-started mills which by this time have greatly multiplied their productive power. Speaking about the possibilities of the *Khaddar* movement in Mysore, the Director of Industries observed :

"The spinning of yarn by hand had died out less than 20 years ago and several old women well remembered the days when they were employed in spinning yarn in their girlhood. The spinning wheels were still stored up in their offices and the occupation was only given up because there was no demand for the yarn."

That is the crux of the whole question, 'there is no demand for the yarn' and the *Khaddarites* under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi are leaving no stone unturned to create an artificial demand! Showing that the *Charka* was a futile cry Mr. Venkatasubbiah of the Servants of India Society observed :

"The extinction of the *Charka* is due to the existence of the mills. Attempts are now being made to revive the *Charka*, but I believe that it is only an artificial stimulus that is being given. The reason for this is that whereas a *Charka* spinner gets only an anna and a half for his work for eight hours, the same spinner at the mills get a rupee. The mill-produced cloth is much cheaper and better."

I do not deny that there are still isolated places not only in India but all over the world where people spin and weave their own cloth as a domestic industry. The current of modern life has not yet reached them, they are still holding to the simple primitive type of life and persisting in their old modes and habits. But their number is very few and gradually dwindling. The *Khaddar* movement may have added a few more to their number, but they are rather the exceptions which prove the rule. The avowed object of the present movement is to help the poor people to supplement their slender income by spinning and the *Khaddar* organisations all over the country are chiefly engaged in disposing of the yarn obtained from the spinners.

While admitting that industrialism is already upon us Mr. Khandeshi would say : "Thus far and no further." This appears like the divine fiat. Let there be light and there was light! I have shown that big machinery and large scale production is indispensable if we would remove the deep poverty of our people. I do not ignore the evils, but I have said that big machinery does

not necessarily imply all the evils of industrialism. The evils are being corrected everywhere. Mr. Gregg in his book gives a dark picture of industrial life in the West which, however, was true only in the early days of industrialism. Since the Factory Act was passed in England in 1833 things have rapidly advanced. Writing of the condition in the West towards the close of the 19th century Dr. Ludwig Stein of the University of Bern observed :

“The philanthropic phase of social politics is now over. The protection of the labouring classes against an inadmissible expenditure of their working powers, against substances prejudicial to health in their work, against prolonging the periods of work beyond the point sanctioned by society, against massing of the labouring classes in hygienically unsound localities, against injuries to the coming generation in the form of child labour and the labour of woman—all these just requirements of society have to-day, thanks to our sharp social sensibility, come to be generally accepted.”

- Now the factory workers in the West live a life which is a luxury in comparison with the wretched life lived by our agriculturists. In America the labourers often earn enough to keep their own motor-cars! England is preeminently an industrial country, but the

general condition of living there is beyond the dream of the average Indian. All these are capitalistic countries. Socialistic Russia has held before the world the ideal of a novel solution of all the evils of industrialism. India also will solve the problems in her own way. How can the evils be overcome unless one enters into it?

The United States of America is the leading industrial nation of the day. Only sixty years ago she was mainly an agricultural country and her condition was as bad as ours. But she has combined specialisation in manufactures with agriculture and in this way she has been able to utilise her economic resources to the fullest extent. This is the secret of her economic and political strength. India also must proceed on this line and once her political serfdom is ended her progress will be marvellous.

Mr. Khandeshi refers to the *Charka* as a healthy recreation and refresher. I wonder whether he has ever spun himself or is labouring under a hypnotic charm. Spinning is at least as much tedious as any other work and people take to it only with a view to earn

something, to supply some want. The leisure hours of our labourers and agriculturists should be devoted not to such work but to true recreation by study, rest and enjoyments; only under these conditions they can hope to grow to their full human stature. Writing of the present condition of the labourers in the West an historian observes :

“In the past, when labour was performed by slaves or serfs, leisure was enjoyed only by the very few wealthy persons. But now that machinery is superseding human labour, it has become possible for millions to enjoy a certain degree of leisure. The work-day is gradually being shortened to eight hours, holidays are more frequent, and vacations more general. This gives opportunities of recreation and culture to many who, in the past, were sunk in misery and ignorance.”

My statement that *Charka* stands in the way of village reconstruction has given a shock to many as it has been the fashion since the days of Non-co-operation to regard *Charka* as being synonymous with village work. I purposely gave that shock so that it might serve as an eye-opener. It is said that *Khaddar* workers incidentally do such work as treating the sick people with medicine, teaching the alphabet to the illiter-

ate, removing the bane of untouchability, and so forth. But all these things could have been done better if the energy of the workers had not been mainly taken up by the sterile *Khaddar* work, and those functions not made secondary. Then, what is true village work? You cannot organise the villagers simply by distributing medicines to them or opening primary schools or libraries. The essence of village work is to bring a new light, a new awakening, to rouse in the hearts of the villagers the desire to raise the standard of their living, to make them dynamic and to induce them to combine with one another to change and improve their condition in every possible way. All this is not done by *Khaddar* which, on the contrary, teaches people the virtue of poverty and reconciles them to their lot by adding a few annas to their miserable monthly income. The *Charka* is truly an opiate and not a renovator!

Mr. Khandeshi gives me a parting advice not to criticise *Khaddar* without knowledge. I can assure him that, I have read more of *Khaddar* literature and seen more of *Khaddar* work as well as the actual condition of our

poor people than he and his friends fondly imagine. In my turn let me tell *Khaddarites* of Khandesh as well as other places that if they truly desire to be the friends of the poor and aspire to serve our great Motherland they must have an open mind and not fixed ideas and notions, they must not blind themselves by theories and fads, but squarely look at facts and figures and, what is most important, they must always have the sincerity and the courage to give up their pet schemes and plans and even to demolish ruthlessly the works of their own hands if they be found to be detrimental to the true interests of the country. This is a great and difficult act of sacrifice which Mother India expects of all her sons at this critical juncture in her history.

VIII

THE PROBLEM OF POVERTY

The poverty of the people of India is appalling and on account of this they cannot make progress in any direction. All nation-building activities such as education and sanitation which are essential for the welfare of the people require large sums of money to be spent on them. A people suffering from chronic starvation and lowered vitality cannot expect to grow to their full moral and spiritual stature. That England has practically freed herself from epidemics and all preventible diseases, that America has provided for the efficient education of all the people irrespective of caste, creed or sex, that Japan has been able to compete with the foremost Western countries almost on equal terms, all these have been possible on account of the vast wealth those countries have at

their disposal to devote to the well-being of the people. If the Indians are to show the best that is in them, nay, if they are to live, the deep and widespread poverty of the people must be removed in the first instance.

India with her immense natural resources and a people having abundant vitality and creative power was once the richest country in the world showing extraordinary activity and progress in all departments of life; but now she is the poorest. It is not our purpose here to describe the rich and prosperous life in ancient India nor to enter into a detailed discussion of the complex causes that have led to her present pitiable condition with all the political, social and moral evils attendant on the abject poverty of the people. The material causes of India's poverty can be brought under two heads, India is not producing sufficient wealth and India is being bled white by a foreign rule and foreign exploitation. The first and foremost necessity is to stop this bleeding and to increase India's national income by an organised development of agricultural as well as industrial resources of the country.

Agriculture which occupies more than seventy per cent. of the people of India is still in the primitive condition. "It cannot be gainsaid" as was admitted by Lord Reading, the former Viceroy of India "that the average standard of production and the general level of rural welfare in India is lower than that prevailing in other countries where for some time past there has been marked concentration of agricultural problems." Thus, for example, the yield per acre in rice is 6,232 lbs. in Japan, 2,610 lbs. in Egypt, 1,330 lbs. in India. The average yield of wheat per acre in India reaches only 11 bushels. By adequate fertilization the yield can be raised to 38 bushels per acre. The application of science is the key to the improvement of this great staple industry of India.

Then the vast industrial possibilities of the country are lying untapped. Bihar alone is in a position to export both iron and coal to her heart's content and yet retain enough to build up an iron and steel industry that would supply indefinitely half the world. In the matter of industrial development the native

state of Mysore stands as an object lesson to the rest of India. One of the several causes that have made the state of Mysore the most forward in India is its vigorous industrial policy. The success of the gold mines yielding enormous profits and the concomitant employment of thousands of people set the Mysore Government seriously to the task of building up the now accomplished industrial Mysore. The Kavery scheme to generate electricity was undertaken in the early eighties, which has from the very beginning proved a highly remunerative project. Then followed in the regime of Sir M. Visweswarya an all round progress of Agricultural and Industrial developments. The second biggest dam in the world, the Krishnaraja Sagara, which has within itself potentialities of great benefit to the future generations of Mysore was built. The dying cottage industries were renovated. Factories were established as a model for the people to copy. Soap factories were started and the silk industry which was in a very crude form was brought in line with the modern standards. The success of the Tata Iron and Steel Works encouraged His High-

ness the Maharaja to start the Bhadrabati Iron and Steel Works. The products manufactured are Charcoal Pig Iron, C. P. Menthaul, Denaturing grade Menthaul, Methyl Acetone, Acetate of Lime, Wood Tar, Wood Preservative, Black Paint, Wood Tar Pitch and Cast Iron Pipes. A market has been steadily built up for the above products in India and foreign countries namely, England, the Continent, America and Japan. The management is conducted mostly by local talent and thousands of people are employed. Mysore has illustrated beyond doubt what India can do to remove the poverty of the people if she has the management of the affairs in her own hands. But it is not to the interests of Great Britain that India should develop industrially and so she is compelled to depend mainly on agriculture and that even of the most crude and primitive type.

As regards the exploitation of India by the British we cannot do better than quote the following description of it given by Prof. A. Demangeon of the Sorborne University.

"India is the typical colony for exploitation. Immensely rich and thickly populated, she represents for the masters at once a fortune and a

defence. It is through India that the British Empire assures her destiny. India is the halting place of British Commerce to the Far East. India gives the fleet places of support for the sea-route. India recruits for the Army legion of high-spirited soldiers; native contingents fight for Great Britain in China and South Africa. During the Great War, India supplied more than a million men of whom more than a lac were killed. India is for Great Britain an enormous market; two-thirds of her importations come from English sources; she furnishes 51 per cent. of the wheat production of the Empire, 58 per cent. of the tea, 73 per cent. of the coffee, almost all the cotton. An immense British capital is invested in Indian mines, factories, plantations, railways and irrigation works. India pays the interest on probably 350 million pounds sterling. India keeps busy an army of British Officials whose salaries she pays and whose savings go every year to Great Britain. She pours into British coffers the interest on her public debt, the pensions of old officials, the Governmental expenses of her administration. More than 30 million pounds sterling a year is the estimate of the sums that India pays in the United Kingdom to her creditors, her stock-holders and officials. At that we do not know how much she brings to the merchants who trade with her and the shippers who transport her goods. Never was the term exploitation better employed."

With this enormous persistent drainage of the wealth, with her natural resources undeveloped, with millions of persons who are chronically under-employed, it is no wonder that India has reached the lowest depths of

poverty and hardship. To add to her misery the population of the country, is increasing giving more mouths to feed and if the population had not been controlled by disease and an extraordinarily high death rate life in India would have been still more miserable. The poor agriculturists of India cannot make any provision for future scarcity. On the other hand their indebtedness is terribly heavy and is put down at between Rs. 600 to 800 crores! The failure of crop for a year or two at once plunges them into terrible famine and as they have to depend almost entirely on the rains for their crop and as the rains are naturally irregular chronic famine and starvation has become the inevitable lot of the majority of Indians.

But apart from those material causes of the poverty of India there is also a moral cause which on account of its subtlety easily escapes our attention though it has been a fundamental factor in determining our present fallen condition and abject poverty. A distortion of the great spiritual ideal of ancient India has led the people to regard poverty itself as virtue. For centuries the

people of India have been taught that this life on the earth is a *Maya*, a falsehood, that all its joys and sorrows are transitory and unreal, that the enjoyment of life degrades one spiritually and that the sooner one can escape from this life of falsehood the better for his soul. This teaching of asceticism and *Mayavad* has done immense harm to India. The attempt to push *Mayavad* upon a whole people resulted in their losing all zest in life; the higher movement of life was choked in them and the vital being thus suppressed began to move in narrow channels, for example, the family life confined to the husband, wife and children, the life of petty service and so forth. People were not attracted by the higher plays of life. *Mayavad* is all right for a limited few who by their nature are capable of deriving some benefit from it; but it should not have been so vigorously preached to the masses.

It is the impact with the vigorous races of the West with their passion for life and for the joy of life that is helping the Indians to shake the spell of *Mayavad* and asceticism. The national movement coming on its wake

has induced the Indians to study their past and to reinterpret their ancient culture casting off the dead weight of custom and tradition. We are now realising that the neglect of life and the undervaluation of the joys of life were no part of the great ancient teaching of India. The *Vedas*, the *Upanishads* and the *Gita* have taught us to make the best use of life by developing it to its fulness and to make the life of this earth and in this body to be the basis of a higher spiritual and divine life. Thus the *Isha Upanishad* says: "By renouncing (the base movements of life) thou shouldst enjoy.....Doing verily works in this world one should wish to live a hundred years." In the *Gita* "the great command to Arjuna given after the foundation and main structure of the teaching have been laid and built, 'Arise, slay thy enemies, enjoy a prosperous kingdom' has not the ring of an uncompromising altruism or of a white, dispassionate abnegation; it is a state of inner poise and wideness which is the foundation of spiritual freedom."

If we consider the ancient scheme of *Varnashram* we find that though *Moksha* or spiri-

tual freedom was regarded as the ultimate aim of life, people had to develop their body and soul through earthly enjoyments *Kama*, and for this they had to acquire the necessary means, *artha*, though of course all their activities were to be guided and controlled by spiritual motives, *dharma*. Thus *Dharma*, *Artha*, *Kama*, *Moksha* constituted the four-fold ideal of life. The life that we find depicted in the Ramayan and Mahabharat and in the great monuments of classical sanskrit literature does not show that poverty and bareness was ever regarded as an ideal in India. The aesthetic satisfactions of all kinds and grades were an important part of Indian culture and they were made instruments of spiritual development. It is only when the life-force of the Indians had begun to decline in the course of time that Acharya Shankara appeared with his teaching of the renunciation of life and *karma*. It is a very happy sign that in modern India we are rapidly outgrowing the ascetic teaching of Shankara and returning to the Vedic ideal of a prosperous joyful divine life even on this earth.

But unfortunately a reactionary movement has already set in and this also has had its immediate origin in our contact with the West. This time it is not the Indian asceticism with its high spiritual significance which is being vigorously preached to the masses but the doctrines of the Christian Monks of the middle ages in Europe, who regarded a bare, poor, ugly, ascetic life as the highest virtue and suffering as a necessary means of salvation. Poverty and suffering were always regarded as evils in India on account of their soul-killing and demoralising effects though some times good might come out of them as out of all evils; but they were regarded as being virtues in themselves by the preachers of Christianity. Blessed are the poor, blessed are they that mourn—these were the tenets of their teaching. The so-called Christian races of modern Europe escaped the disastrous effects of this wrong view of religion by divorcing religion from their life. But in India religion is bound up with the life of the people, the teachings of our saints and *sadhakas* have the profoundest influence on the mentality and conduct of our masses. At

the present day in India there is no one man who has greater influence on the masses than Mahatma Gandhi. But Mahatma Gandhi has been influenced more by the teachings of Tolstoy and the Bible than by anything Indian. He has been aptly called the Christ of the Indian Road and has vigorously held up before the people of India the medieval Christian ideal of poverty, suffering and gloomy asceticism. In his *Ashram* at Sabar-mati the first vow that the disciples have to take is that of poverty. A man may have to cheerfully accept poverty and suffering as a necessary evil in the performance of his duty, but when they are held up as ideals in themselves they have a great depressing effect upon the life of the people.

The remedy that Mahatma Gandhi has prescribed for improving the economic condition of the people is quite characteristic. The *Charka* is the very symbol of poverty. No one will deny that the vast masses of our people are most miserably poor and that they must be given sufficient employment so that they may earn a decent livelihood. But how does the *Charka* help? By working whole

day on the *Charka* a man cannot earn more than Rs. 5/- a month. How can a man live on this income unless he be a world-shunning saint and an ascetic? With five rupees only as his monthly income a man cannot have sufficient food and clothing, a sanitary dwelling place, facilities for self-development, adequate means for properly educating and bringing up his children, provision for the future, treatment in case of disease and such other things which are necessary for a decent human life. If the *Charka* be wholly inadequate, as it actually is, to meet the essential needs of life how do you hold it up as the means of the economic salvation of the people? It will be said that the ideal is not to depend on the *Charka* but to make it only as supplementary industry for leisure hours. Supplementary industries are certainly needed and the various dying cottage industries should be revived wherever possible and strengthened by modern devices; they should be encouraged consulting local needs and possibilities—but the simple formula, “*Charka* for all” cannot at all meet the needs of the situation. The *Charka* must be judged

not from the ease with which it can be universally adopted provided every one in the country consents to wear *Khaddar* leaving aside cheaper and better-made mill-cloth, but from the actual amelioration in the condition of the people it can bring about. If as a sole occupation the *Charka* can hardly give more than Rs. 5/- a month, as a supplementary industry it cannot generally give more than a rupee and this paltry addition to the income of our people cannot bring any material change in their condition. Apart from all theoretical considerations what economic help the *Charka* has actually brought to the poor people will appear from a consideration of the reports of the various authorised *Khadi* organisations in the country. There is no better *Khadi* worker in India than Babu Rajendra Prasad in Bihar or Srijiut C. Rajagopalachari in Tamil Nadu. In Bihar the spinners have earned at the rate of less than one rupee a month on the average; in the Gandhi Ashram in Tamil Nadu they have received wages at the rate of less than ten annas per month. And this is said to be the

only solution of the economic problem of the masses of India!

No, the deep and widespread poverty of our masses cannot be alleviated unless we increase the wealth of the country by large scale production through machinery. Our people seem to have a dread of machinery and large scale production on account of the evils attendant on industrialism. But big machinery does not necessarily imply all the evils of industrialism. The evils are bound to disappear. Unless one enters into it, how can the evils be overcome? The different ideas and schemes suggested in Europe show that the people are trying to correct the defects. Why should the Indians wait until other countries solved their problems so that they might imitate afterwards?

While other countries are trying to give living wages to their labourers—by living wages is meant at least Rs. 40 to Rs. 50 a month—and to reduce their hours of labour to a maximum of 6 to 7 hours a day, the friends of the poor in our country are leaving no stone unturned to increase the monthly income of our toiling masses from Rs. 4 to Rs. 5 and that by

compelling them to work even in their leisure hours! No country in the world is giving up machinery on account of the evils that may arise from it but are trying and that with more and more success to remove those evils in their own way.

It is the tendency of the Indians towards poverty which is really responsible for the cry against machinery. But our leaders do not seem to realise that by raising this cry they are helping the very interests of the British Imperialists, which they are out to destroy. Our British rulers do not want that India should have full industrial development but that she should remain mainly an agricultural country thus providing an eternal market for the industrial products of Great Britain.

Removal of foreign rule with its attendant exploitation, reduction of expenditure on the army and the civil administration, a national mercantile marine; improved railway transport; the inauguration of other less costly means of transport such as canals and waterways for the development of internal trade; application of science and technical skill to

agriculture; extension of large scale production through machinery; organisation of suitable cottage industries with modern devices and methods; facilities in banking and insurance; co-operative organisations for sale and purchase and other purposes; technical education; modification of the whole university system; improved sanitation; a good thumping tariff to protect Indian industries—these measures and others would alleviate the poverty of the Indian masses if the people themselves would give up the false ideal of poverty and bareness being a virtue in itself, if they were inspired by the determination to improve their conditions and were prepared to make the necessary sacrifices of custom, prejudice and quasi-religious beliefs.

IX

MORAL VALUE OF THE CHARKA

Mr. Nair, a member of the Satyagraha Ashram at Sabarmati has sought to give a new turn to the *Khaddar* controversy by proposing not to oppose me with facts and figures which, he says, are most misleading but to lay stress on the moral and spiritual aspects of the *Khaddar* movement. I must confess that here I am in my elements as I am constitutionally more a philosopher and a spiritual seeker than a mere politician or an economist. I also feel that no amount of facts and figures and arguments I produce will convert those with whom *Khaddar* is more a matter of faith and religion than of reason and economics. It seems to them that giving up *Khadi* means giving up Gandhi, giving up Bapu, and they have certainly not the heart to do that. But my position is quite clear.

My respect for Mahatma Gandhi does not stand on such an uncertain footing as the *Charka*. The Mahatma may commit Himalayan blunders in the field of politics and economics, still he will occupy a very high position in the hearts not only of his own countrymen but of all people on account of the high moral ideal he has held up before the world in his personality and character. He has rendered a great service to the cause of humanity by pitching moral force against brute force, not only in theory but in the practical solution of problems that are troubling the race. It is true that he has not been able to achieve much success; but his very attempt is a great contribution to the future possibilities of the human being. The causes of his failure are obvious. His appeal is not to the brute in man, but to his soul. But of how many men on earth can it be as yet said that they have at all a soul to respond? In most people the soul has not yet emerged, they live a physical and vital life with a crude superficial play of the mind and reason and they must be dealt with by physical and vital forces however much these

may have to be backed by moral force to which Mahatma Gandhi has given the name Soul-force. In a world as it actually is at present, a Mirabeau, a Bismarck, a Mussolini has a far greater chance of success in dealing with human beings than our simple, honest, non-violent Mahatma Gandhi. Count Mirabeau was even more revolting in his moral character than in his ugly personal appearance—yet he became the greatest political figure of Europe in his time and inaugurated a historic revolution which sent across the world the ideals of Liberty, Equality and Fraternity,—great ideals which are now bidding fair to create a new higher order of humanity.

It is really the personality of Mahatma Gandhi with his great sacrifice and moral force that is preventing people from seeing the utter futility of the *Charka*. • But if we allow our personal and moral predilections to cloud our vision about the true interests and well-being of the country we shall be untrue to our great Motherland who is higher than even the highest of her sons.

Mr. Nair would fain dispense with facts and figures which seem to him to be

most misleading but he himself cannot resist the temptation of quoting facts and figures which appear to him to be in support of his own cause. Thus he cites the fact of Britain's imperialism which has truly become a standing menace to world peace and also quotes the figure of unemployment in that country. But Mr. Nair forgets that there were war and imperialism in the world even before the advent of modern industrialism and that England enslaved India at a time when all English people were wearing *Khaddar* and every English village was humming with the music of the spinning wheel. As long as there are greed and lust and passion in human nature man will find out some excuse or other for war and for exploiting weaker people under the moral pretence of trusteeship. The number of the unemployed in Great Britain is not due to large-scale production through big machinery but to the capitalistic system. We do not believe, like our young leaders, that the Russian brand of Socialism or Communism is the panacea for all evils. But the Socialistic theory and the Russian experiment have shown beyond all doubt that large-scale pro-

duction does not necessarily imply all the evils of industrialism. The difference between Capitalism and Socialism does not lie in large-scale production but in the manner of distributing the wealth produced; both agree that there should be the production of plenty of wealth and this is also the clear injunction of our ancient Indian Scriptures. So we must fully utilise the resources modern science has placed in our hands to immensely increase the wealth of our country; and the problem of distribution India will solve in her own way according to her national tradition and genius.

I have already shown beyond doubt that spinning does not and cannot bring any real amelioration in the economic condition of our poverty-stricken masses. So Mr. Nair raises another plea that the *Khaddar* movement has fostered the spirit of *Swadeshi* and brought about a great national awakening. A little consideration will show that this plea also cannot stand. The *Khaddar* movement has not brought any awakening, it is rather the awakening caused in the country by the Punjab and the Khilafat wrongs and by the general post-war awakening all over the world

that was utilised and exploited to re-introduce the use of *Khaddar* in India.* A true spirit of nationalism and *Swadeshism* was first created in India by the partition movement in Bengal, but the spinning wheel had nothing to do with that movement. On the other hand the great political ardour and enthusiasm shown by the Indian people during the Non-co-operation days was damped by the programme of spinning and selling *Khaddar*. It was the narrow and rigid cadre of the so-called Constructive Bardoli programme, with *Khaddar* as its chief item which really killed the Non-co-operation movement. But even now disillusionment has not come to our people. That "Constructive" programme, though it has been able to construct nothing for these eight years, has been again adopted by the Congress in Calcutta by a overwhelming majority under the spell of the personality of Mahatma Gandhi.

Since 1920 no less than fifty lacs of rupees have been spent on *Khaddar*, but not only the villagers, the peasants and the labourers remain as miserable and unorganised as ever, the Congress itself,

the power house of national work is in a moribund condition. Mahatma Gandhi has even gone so far as to say that the Congress is a bogus organisation consisting of self-appointed delegates! If this huge sum of money and the energy and enthusiasm spent on the *Khaddar* movement had been devoted to true constructive work, to the organisation of the people into small co-operative groups or *samghas* to improve their condition in all possible ways according to local needs and conditions, the whole nation by this time would have throbbed with a new life and the problem of finding a sanction for Swaraj could have been easily solved. But that was not to be. Fifty lacs of rupees collected from the poor starving people of India have been wasted to satisfy a fad of "the greatest living man in the world"!

The *Charka* is at most one of hundreds of handicrafts practised by our people to earn a livelihood and to think that spinning has any specific power to awaken the soul or to create the spirit of *Swadeshi* and nationalism is pure superstition. It may shock our *Khaddarites* to know, nevertheless it is quite true, that

there are many spinners and weavers who supply us with pure *Khadi*, but themselves prefer to wear clothes made in Manchester.

But what about Bardoli? Was it not with the help of the spinning wheel, asks Mr. Nair, that Mahatma Gandhi organised the peasants of Bardoli who have saved the honour of India in the recent no-tax campaign? I hope my readers will forgive me if I indulge here in a little plain talk. We have of late heard so much about the great victory of Bardoli that people have naturally come to believe in it. But when did the fight take place at Bardoli? Both sides were preparing and surveying their own forces and their opponents; the Government gave an ultimatum, but before the date of that ultimatum expired a compromise was brought about through negotiations, in which all the demands of the Government were practically fulfilled. In no sense of the term can that compromise be called a victory for the peasants or a defeat for the Government. That the Bardoli campaign has created no impression on the Government is apparent from the fact that two more *taluks* in the same Presidency are again

up in arms against assessment ; in one case, it is said, the tax has been raised forty per cent ! In Bardoli itself the fate of the peasants is still hanging on the balance. So the less we speak of the great victory of Bardoli the better, for self-deception does good to no body.

At the same time I do not grudge in the least to render unto the brave peasants of Bardoli their due. When all over the country our politicians were ceaselessly talking, touring and lecturing and drafting and holding big congresses and conferences and processions as signs of "activism", the peasants of Bardoli courageously stood up for their rights and under the guidance of an able band of workers showed a solid front to the bureaucracy, showing the possibilities of a great mass movement in India.' But what has the spinning wheel to do with all this? In the programme of constructive work drawn up for Bardoli just after the compromise Sirdar Vallabhai Patel gave prominence to the boycott of foreign cloth and the introduction of the *Charka*, showing thereby on the face of it that that programme has yet to be

carried out there though Bardoli has been preparing for Civil disobedience under the guidance of Mahatma Gandhi since 1920. If we free our mind of the *Charka*-complex and analyse the Bardoli situation in the spirit of a scientist we find that whatever success has been achieved there has been due to the facts that the peasants had a real grievance against the Government, they had able leaders and workers to mobilise and organise them for a fight, the political situation in the country was quite favourable the Government being unwilling to irritate the country for the sake of the Simon Commission, the whole country stood by Bardoli paying a subscription of more than 4½ lacs of rupees and offering every kind of help that might be required. Under similar circumstances a "Bardoli" campaign can be successfully organised everywhere without any preliminary "discipline" and "training" through the *Charka*.

My view will be completely borne out if we consider the three great Satyagraha campaigns undertaken in Bengal in recent times. In Midnapur the peasants refused to pay tax until the Union Boards were

abolished and they won; they did not, like the peasants of Bardoli, halt with a compromise. Patuakhali also won a real victory. At Tarakeswar the Satyagraha campaign ended in an honourable compromise, the Mohunt agreeing to abdicate, though it was most unfortunately spoilt by the short-sightedness of our own people, the Brahmin Sabha of Bengal. Yet the splendid organising power that the young men of Bengal showed at Tarakeswar was unique, and the peoples' spirit of resistance was unconquerable. It may not be known to all that it was the organising ability shown by the workers of Bengal in the Tarakeswar campaign which really upset Lord Lytton and precipitated the Bengal ordinance which by itself has dealt a severe blow at British rule in India. In none of these great campaigns of peaceful *Satyagraha* was it necessary to prepare the workers or the people through the *Charka* and our national leaders will do well to take note of this carefully when they talk of "Bardolising" the whole country.

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